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ABSTRACT

This report describes a study to investigate the improved efficiency and effectiveness of prison library provision in England and Wales, through the development and validation of relevant performance indicators to be used as part of quality assurance programs. Prison libraries perform important educational, rehabilitative, and recreational functions. In response to an increasing pressure to show accountability in terms of value for money, a variety of organizations are reassessing performance. The Prison Department recognizes the value of the input of public library services, and has hoped that standards adopted by the public library profession would automatically be transferred to prison library services. However, prison libraries are sufficiently different from public libraries to necessitate performance measures unique to their setting. Factors such as security and care of inmates and staff, transiency of the population, inmate library access, and intensity of library use all contribute towards the disparity between public and prison library services at an operational level. Performance measures were developed based on interviews with prison staff and inmates, observation and monitoring of library service, and reviews of existing documentation. The performance indicators are categorized in three groups: resources--how and to what extent prison library services are resourced, in both financial and non-financial terms; service--statistics of library usage; and consumer indicators--factors concerned with the library users and potential library users. (Author/SWC)

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The Development of Performance Indicators for Prison Libraries

by Susan D. Lithgow

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The Development of Performance Indicators for Prison Libraries

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1. Introduction

This seminar is based on research conducted as part of the author's PhD thesis, which set out to investigate the improved efficiency and effectiveness of prison library provision in England and Wales, through the development and validation of relevant performance indicators to be used as part of quality assurance programmes (Lithgow, 1994). The research had the full support of the Chief Education Officer's Branch of the Home Office Prison Service and the Prison Libraries Group of the Library Association throughout its conduct, which greatly assisted in its practical application on completion.

2. Timeliness

Prison libraries perform important educational, rehabilitatory and recreational functions. Their potential as a fully effective agency is often not realised and there is a lack of evidence on which to secure future development. In response to an increasing pressure to show accountability in terms of value for money, a variety of organisations are reassessing performance. Moreover, the general climate is such that many aspects of service provision in the public sector are currently being re-examined to see how quality standards may be derived and applied. The Prison Service is no exception and has already begun to use performance related measures in a variety of ways. However, prison libraries which are dependent upon maximum co-operation between individual prison establishments, public library authorities and education service providers, and are therefore subject to a wide range of organisational influences, have yet to experience any such approach.

As the 1978 Home Office Prison Department Policy Statement 7, *Library facilities for people in custody* states,

> 'the library in a custodial institution should as far as possible resemble a good Local Authority branch library'. (Great Britain . . , 1978)

This analogy provided an immediate benchmark, albeit in crude unquantified terms and the sentiment of this comparison has continued to underpin the ethos of prison library provision. The policy statement went on to acknowledge public library services as the

> 'main established source of professional expertise in areas relevant to libraries in the Department's establishments' (ibid.).

As well as recognising the value of the input of public library services, the Prison Department has long envisaged that standards adopted by the public library profession would automatically be transferred to prison library services. Performance measurement is one such standard and though well developed in the public library sector, the suitability of its direct transfer to prison library services is by no means automatic. As Whitehall argues, one of the strengths of a performance measurement approach is its adaptability in terms of its ability to meet the needs of differing organisations, which in turn, should facilitate the interchange of performance measures between different types of library (Whitehall, 1984). Whitehall concludes that it is therefore a failing on the part of library practitioners to perceive, as all libraries are different, that they require different approaches to performance measurement (ibid.).

Although there is a wealth of common ground in terms of the principles of performance measurement, prison libraries are housed within a sufficiently unique environment to warrant their own practice of those principles. Factors such as the transiency of the population, inmate library access and intensity of library use all contribute towards the disparity between public and prison library services at an operational level. These factors are however secondary to the issue of security. The nature of the Prison Service is such that it functions within the bounds of a closed environment. The security and care of inmates and staff take precedence over and above all other considerations and subsidiary services such as library provision must therefore adapt accordingly. Prison libraries operate within a highly volatile environment and the unpredictability of the demands placed upon them has the effect of creating a prison weighting factor. Whilst acknowledging the

universality of the philosophy of a performance measurement approach, this weighting factor constitutes the justification for the development of performance indicators specifically tailored to meet the needs of the prison library community. There should be a central core of indicators common to all prison establishments but as embodied by the *Keys to success* approach, it is also necessary to maintain an element of choice (United Kingdom . . . , 1990). These key indicators should therefore be supplemented by an additional set of optional indicators to allow for local variations.

Customising performance indicators in this way should also serve to enhance their subsequent application, for as one commentator notes:

> 'Managers and supervising staff will feel motivated to make effective use of measures . . . in the activities they control, only if they feel ownership of the measures'. (Jackson and Palmer, 1989)

This is particularly important with regard to prison library provision, which is dependent upon the co-operation of three individual organisations. Producing tailor-made indicators therefore has the added advantage of promoting their corporate ownership which in turn is a means of fostering their effective usage.

Although the timeliness of this research has been cited in relation to the growth of performance measurement within the public sector generally, the receptiveness of prison libraries towards performance measurement was fully realised with the launching of the Written Agreement process. The Written Agreement process was introduced in 1992 by the Standing Committee on Prison Libraries' *Roles and Responsibilities* document and was designed as a means of reaffirming and formalising the existing relationship between the main providing bodies of prison library services (Great Britain . . , 1992, p.20). A Written Agreement is therefore drawn up between each individual prison establishment and its local public library authority. It gives details of the type of prison regime and their inmate populations, together with proposed development plans for a three-year period to complement the Government's Public Expenditure Survey resource planning system.

There are two key elements to the Agreement:

i. A definition of the service to be provided
ii. An indication, through a monitoring system, of how the service will be delivered (ibid. p.26)

It is the second element of the Written Agreement that is of particular relevance to this research. Having defined the level of service provision, each Agreement outlines an accompanying set of key performance indicators. These indicators represent the monitoring system through which each individual establishment is able to determine the extent to which their service level objectives are being fulfilled.

As already discussed, the timing of the Written Agreement process was such that it enhanced the receptiveness of prison libraries towards a performance measurement approach. Moreover, the Written Agreement provided the necessary organisational framework to ensure both the effective implementation and use of the performance indicators. The built-in annual review process also provided an appropriate mechanism for the subsequent evaluation and maintenance of the indicators.

3. Methodology

Having completed an appropriate literature survey, the research methodology began with a series of opinion leader interviews in order to secure the views of a range of individuals representing the prison service, local public library authorities and prison education providers as well as a number of prison reform organisations. The interviews identified a range of current insights on the matters under investigation and also made a series of contacts early in the research to assist in both the development of the research and the dissemination of its results.

Using the information gathered by these means, a series of techniques was devised to collect the necessary data from an appropriate sample of penal establishments for the drafting of performance indicators.

3.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Questionnaires were used as a basis for semi-structured interviews as a means of obtaining views from those with experience in the field. These were conducted with the relevant staff at each site as well as a selection of inmates.

3.1.1 Staff interviews

Interviews were conducted with the following members of staff at each test site; the Governor, Head of Inmate Activities, Education Officer, Prison Library Officer(s) and Professional Librarian. The questions themselves were predominantly open-ended and sought opinions on more general issues such as performance measurement, quality assurance, educa-

tion in prisons and censorship as well as factual responses to questions on the day-to-day running of the library concerned.

3.1.2 Inmate interviews

Questionnaire based semi-structured interviews were held with a minimum of 10% of the population at each test site. Inmates were chosen where possible at random, but on a purely voluntary basis and in consultation with prison staff as to the location and timing of interviews. Respondents were questioned on a variety of issues including their information needs, awareness of the library service, reading habits, use of request and reference services, satisfaction with the service as a whole and, where applicable, their reasons for non-use.

Additional interviews were also held with the inmate orderlies at each test site in their capacity as providers of the service.

3.2 OBSERVATION AND MONITORING

In order to fully assess current library practice, the research could not rely solely upon interviews or existing data and so a variety of observation and monitoring techniques were employed. Within the framework of an observation checklist and headcount tables, the behavioural patterns and activity of both library users and staff were recorded.

Particular attention was paid to monitoring the request service at each test site with log sheets and self-completion questionnaires being used to test the effectiveness of request services for both document and information requests. Enquiries were logged on receipt and enquirers given the opportunity to comment on the relevance of the response to their request.

3.3 ACCESS TO DOCUMENTATION

In order to supplement data collected during fieldwork, it was also necessary to seek access to existing documentation such as area contracts, library policy statements, committee meeting minutes, budgetary information, population figures, available statistics of library usage and any reports or assessments already made.

3.4 DRAFT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A set of draft performance indicators was produced based on the data collected via the above methods. This involved designing a database to analyse the questionnaires, together with an analysis of existing performance indicators such as those from the public library context and the National Health Service.

Following an initial testing period at a further test site, the draft indicators were circulated to opinion leaders for comment. As a result, certain data collection methods were revised. The redrafted indicators underwent a final testing period at two further test sites. The results from this final testing period were used to produce recommendations for the development of prison library services, detailing the advantages of a performance measurement approach within the wider context of quality assurance programmes. Recommendations were also made for the maintenance of such programmes.

4. Summary of Results

The performance indicators developed by this research have been broadly categorised into three discrete groups: resource, service and consumer indicators. However, these divisions have been made for the purposes of convenience only and it is important to remember that the indicators should not be viewed in isolation as perhaps suggested by this artificial arrangement.

Each group of indicators will be considered in turn with the aid of illustrative examples but before this can be done it is necessary to discuss the prerequisite data upon which their calculation is based.

4.1 PRE-REQUISITE DATA

The formation of performance indicators is dependent upon certain specified data components. These data components comprise a series of standard and generally readily available pieces of information. There will however be local inter-establishment variations in that the information may not necessarily be held in the same place, in the same format or indeed it may not be collected with the same frequency or by the same personnel. The required data can be broadly grouped under the following headings;

i. population profile
ii. funding
iii. staffing levels
iv. stock levels
v. accommodation
vi. opening hours
vii. membership
viii. statistics of use
ix. loan/visiting restrictions
x. user education programme
xi. education/labour programme

As they stand alone, these data components are not indicative of the library's performance, rather they provide the framework upon which the indicators can subsequently be developed. Establishments are already required to maintain much of the information specified above under the Written Agreement process and now that these Agreements are firmly in place the co-ordination of this data has been greatly simplified.

4.2 RESOURCE INDICATORS

Resource indicators are those concerned with how and to what extent prison library services are resourced, in both financial and non-financial terms.

4.2.1 Cost effectiveness

Of fundamental importance is the need to establish the unit cost of prison library services. This is a complex procedure as it involves a number of separate costs which are then divided between the cost to the Prison Service and the cost to the Public Library Authority. However, the significance of cost-effectiveness indicators is such that an informed estimate of total costs was regarded as an acceptable alternative to an absolute measure, provided that those concerned are fully aware of its estimated status. The principal cost-effectiveness indicator is:

- cost of providing the library service per head of inmate population

Such an indicator is particularly useful for comparative purposes as well as for monitoring the overall cost of the service on a regular basis. If it was considered appropriate to examine the costing of a particular aspect of the library service, the necessary data would be available to calculate the additional indicator:

- cost per transaction

For example, it is possible to calculate the cost of issuing a book or the cost of keeping the library open for an hour, which can provide valuable information in any subsequent consideration of future resourcing levels.

4.2.2 Staff levels

The research process highlighted the variation in library staffing levels between individual establishments both in terms of the category of staff and their working hours. To take account of these variations the corresponding indicator is:

- staff hours as a percentage of library opening hours

which can then be expressed in terms of the individual staff concerned from the professional librarian to Library Officers/relief officers and inmate orderlies. As a result of the funding made available by the Home Office Prison Service for the appointment of a professional librarian in every prison establishment the staff indicators also include:

- professional librarian hours as a percentage of inmate access time

which will provide an indication of the available inmate contact time. Both these indicators can usefully be expressed in terms of a weekly or monthly figure so that actual staff hours can then be compared against intended staff hours. The continued inability to maintain intended levels could therefore signify the need for the subsequent consideration of the whole issue of staffing levels and the appropriateness of relevant targets.

These indicators also highlight the importance of distinguishing between library opening hours and inmate access time with the latter sometimes accounting for a limited proportion of the stated opening hours.

4.2.3 Stock

As a means of establishing a measure of the resources available to inmates the finalised indicator is:

- items of stock per active user

This can then be expressed in terms of appropriate stock categories including lending stock, reference material, tapes, periodicals and newspapers. Such an indicator also needs to be regarded in relation to a minimum stock level which could usefully be based upon the Library Association recommendation of ten items per capita (LA, 1981, p.19).

With regard to the movement of stock within an individual library, the finalised indicators also include:

- percentage of stock exchanged per annum

This indicator also needs to be considered in relation to a minimum target which again could be usefully based upon the Library Association recommendation of between 20% and 30% depending on local circumstances (ibid., p.21). Thus, for example, in an establishment with a high turnover of short-stay inmates, the pressure to exchange stock is not so immediate and a lower target would suffice.

Stock indicators regarding library acquisitions and withdrawals as well as lost and damaged material were also devised.

4.2.4 Opening hours

Library opening hours were also regarded as a resource and the principal indicator in this respect is:

- actual hours open per week as a percentage of intended

As with staffing hours, stated opening hours may differ from actual opening hours for a variety of reasons, including the secondment of uniformed staff to other duties. By comparing actual hours with intended hours in this way it is possible to achieve an assessment of the extent to which proposed opening hours are being maintained. The continued failure to meet stated levels could therefore indicate the need to consider possible reasons and take remedial action accordingly.

4.3 SERVICE INDICATORS

Service indicators refer principally to statistics of library usage.

4.3.1 Library usage

In order to achieve a measure of the overall usage of the library in terms of inmate throughput, it is useful to monitor the number of inmates using the library within a set period. The primary indicator is:

- library users per week

From the annual review of these figures it may be possible to identify seasonal trends, but any substantial unexpected increase or decrease may indicate the need for investigative action. Data of this nature can be used as evidence in support of the increased intensity of library usage and the subsequent proposal of increased resources.

4.3.2 Issues

Based on the prerequisite data component of the total number of issues per annum it is possible to produce such indicators as:

- issues per active user per annum

Monitoring the number of issues in this way provides an overall indication of the extent of library borrowing activity within an establishment. As in the case of usage levels, unexpected variations may indicate the need for further action to identify possible causes. For example, a significant increase in issues may contribute towards the need to extend library access or a decrease may signify the need to examine library awareness levels.

In order to arrive at some measure of stock turnover the indicator of:

- issues per item of stock

can be usefully employed. This in turn should be regarded in relation to a specified target of the minimum number of loans per annum. Such targets should be locally devised, taking account of such factors as population levels, loan restrictions and library access. If particular sections of the stock appear to be poorly or excessively used then a further refinement of this indicator to include issues per category of stock may help to clarify the situation.

4.3.3 Request service

Based on the details surrounding the number of requests received annually, the relevant indicators include:

- requests received per active user per annum
- percentage of requests satisfied within a specified number of days

By calculating an approximate number of requests received from each active library user it is possible to achieve an indication of the extent to which the request service is used. Target setting retains an important role within request service monitoring but in relation to the supply rather than the receipt of requests. In an effort to ensure the quality of the request service in terms of the speed with which material is supplied, it is possible to devise targets whereby a specified percentage of requests will be satisfied in a specified number of days. It is of course also important to consider the percentage of requests not satisfied out of those received.

A similar approach was taken with regard to the monitoring of reference and information enquiries.

4.4 CONSUMER INDICATORS

Consumer indicators are those concerned with the library users and potential library users themselves. For the most part they are dependent upon the conduct of a user survey.

4.4.1 Population

With regard to library membership levels the basic indicator is:

- library users as a percentage of the total population

This indicator provides a means of monitoring the number of non-library users within an establishment. Rigid target-setting in this context was considered inappropriate although an unexpected reduction in user levels could indicate the need for further investigation.

4.4.2 User satisfaction

Through the employment of user surveys it is possible to measure user satisfaction with a range of service aspects including: book stock, loan allowances, length and frequency of visits, request service and information provision. Whether considering user satisfaction with an individual element of the service or a combination of features, local opinion will dictate what constitutes an acceptable level of satisfaction. Having identified potential problem areas, additional responses from the same survey may help to establish possible explanations or it may be necessary to tailor a separate investigation for the issues concerned.

4.4.3 Failure analysis

Library surveys can be specifically tailored to develop needs-fill-rate indicators. Having asked inmates how often they found what they wanted in the library, a low rate of success could result in appropriate follow-up procedures whereby failure analysis would be conducted in relation to critical incidents. As in other situations the outcome of such an approach will be determined by a number of contributory factors and it is therefore important to regard such issues as needs-fill rates in relation to other considerations including library awareness, staffing levels and access.

4.4.4 Library service awareness

Library surveys can also provide the necessary data to produce indicators that determine inmates' overall awareness of the library and its services together with the subsequent frequency with which they use it. If inmates prove to be consistently unaware of a particular aspect of the service this may strengthen the case for library induction.

4.4.5 Opinion indicators

The volume and nature of inmate opinions and comments generated throughout the research process highlighted the significance of incorporating this material into a performance measurement approach. Rather than producing formalised indicators relating to opinions, of fundamental importance is the need to ensure the existence of facilities through which inmates can express their views. Such comments can assist in the interpretation of other indicators through the replication of results as well as the discovery of supporting information not exposed by any other means.

5. Further Research

It has been possible to further the PhD research through the receipt of a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship from the Department for Education. Having developed a set of performance indicators for prison libraries the work is now being taken forward by monitoring their implementation. The main thrust of the Fellowship is therefore the production of a performance indicator user manual which will detail the purpose, calculation, application and maintenance of key performance indicators. It is intended that the manual will act as a performance indicator toolkit for prison libraries. It will be designed to aid the re-evaluation of the effectiveness of existing indicators as well as to provide an overall increased awareness and understanding of the organisational requirements in supporting and maintaining a performance measurement approach. The continued support of the Home Office Standing Committee on Prison Libraries will ensure that the manual and the indicators therein are incorporated into the prison library service and used to maximum effect.

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